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FABLES AND SATIRES

F.S.--A

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FABLES

and

SATIRES

by

HAROLD MORLAND

drawings

by

HELEN KAPP

ROUTLEDGE LONDON

First published 1945
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AD SARAM

Surrexerunt filii ejus, et beatissimam praedicaverunt

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NOTE OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

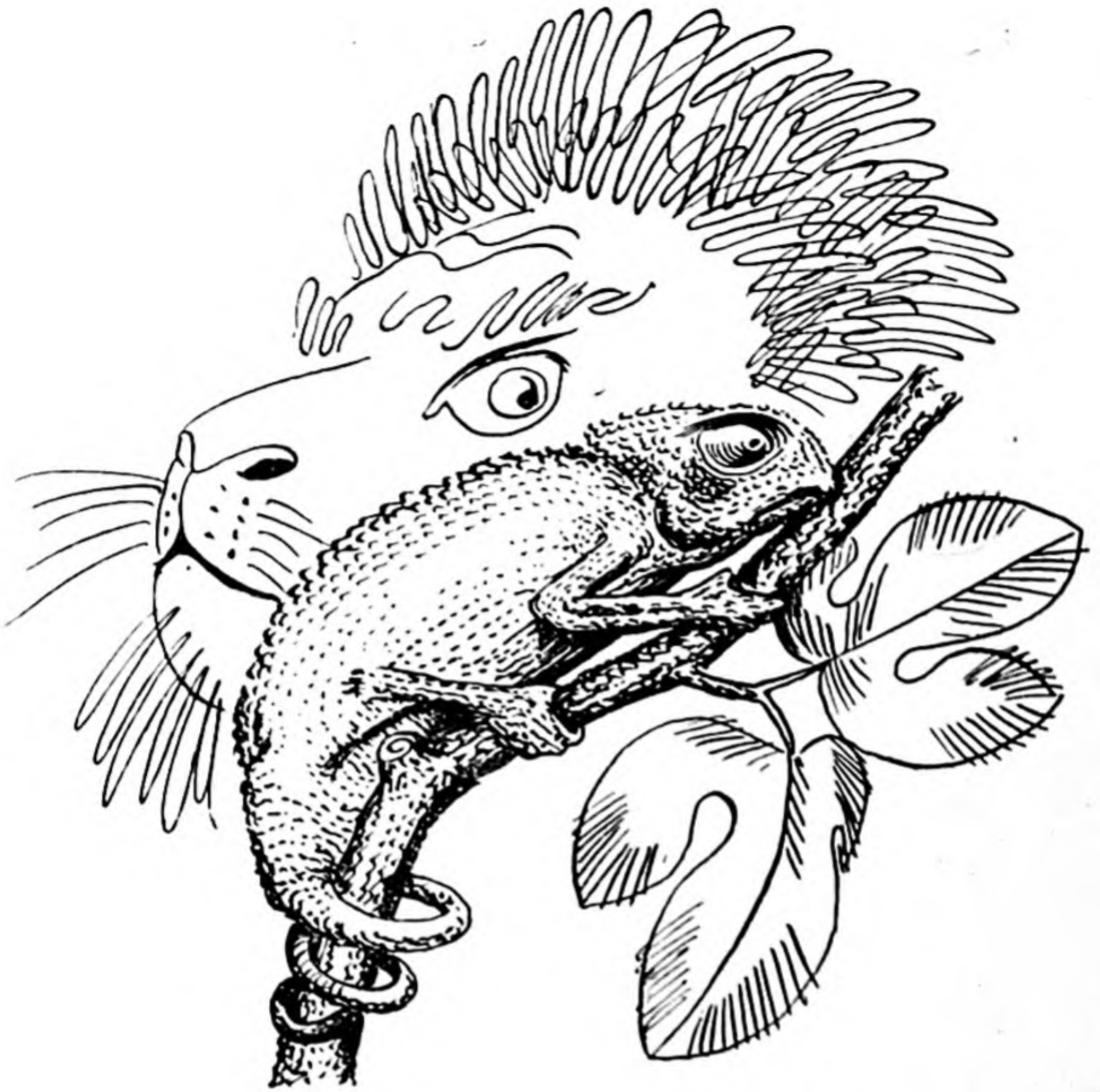
Four of these Fables have already appeared
in *Tribune* (London).

FABLES AND SATIRES

THE LION AND THE BUCK

Down in a dappled glade a buck
With skin like shining jet
Was reading in a book,
Learning his alphabet.

The lion laughed: "More wonders yet?
A common buck that learns his letters
In hope to emulate his betters?
Preposterous! Ignorant flesh is just as sweet
As learned meat."



THE LION AND THE CHAMELEON

THE Lion jibes: "Change colour so,
And never know
What coat I'd really on!
I'd scorn to do it! I keep true."

"With half your strength, me too!"
Sighs the Chameleon.

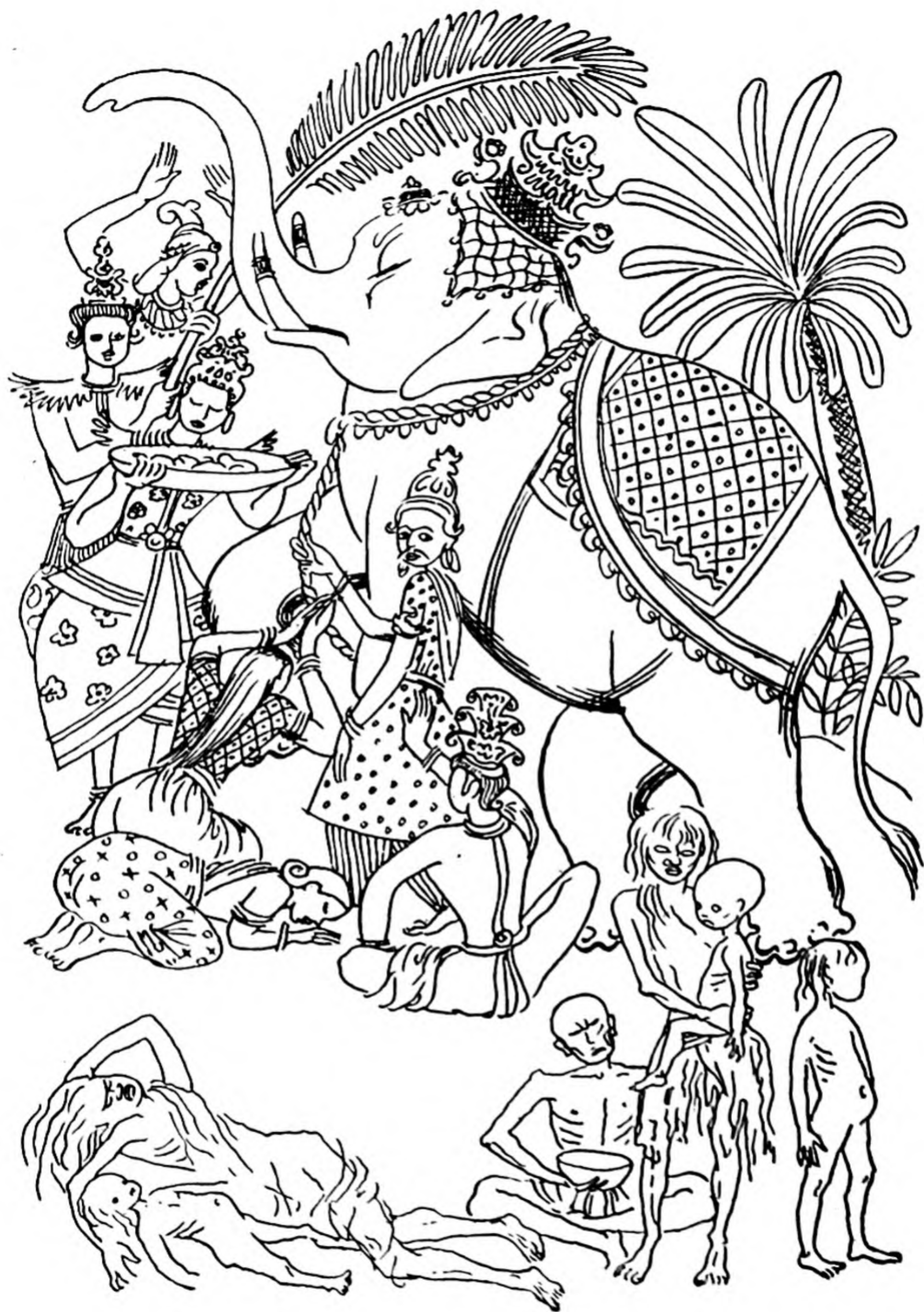
THE WHITE ELEPHANT

DEEP in the twisted jungles of Siam
A traveller, who had tried
Every trick and sham
To make his fortune, spied
An elephant in shape, but faintly pink.
At first he put it down to drink
And said: "Absurd!"
Then realised, the herd
Had branded as a rogue and driven out
This queer albino.

And a shock
Of joy exalted him; he just suppressed a shout:
The people of Bangkok,
The city-men, the prince, the magistrates,
Would subsidise him from the rates
For giving common people some distraction
From demanding social action.

And the prince and court in coloured pomp
Come out to greet
This benefactor, and the street
Is lined with multitudes that hope
To touch at least the silken rope
Leading the elephant. Before its feet
Men lie in ecstasy and weep;
A woman here gives birth;
And when the creature urinates
The barren soak the liquid up,
Believing that it fecundates
The whole delirious earth.

And every day a golden mandarin
With a nodding peacock crest must wait
To feed it from a silver plate



Heaped high with rarest foods, brought in
From far Celebes and the fronded isle
Of Mindanao, while
Naked boys and dancing girls delight
Its heavy slumbrous afternoon
And restless night.

The traveller too receives the boon
He dreamt of: pearls
And girls
And palaces and gold, and nothing now to pay.
And the commons sweat
And every day
Grind deeper down and happily forget
This burden added to their old distress;
For lo! a god has come their poverty to bless.

THE STARFISH AND THE OYSTER

A STARFISH feeling hungry came
Across an oyster lying there content,
And said: "For shame!
God's creatures surely were not meant
So unprogressively to bide
The gentle rise and fall of the passing tide."
"How should I know?"

The oyster patiently replied;
"But if I fail to answer His intent,
He'll tell me so."

"But need you wait
For that apocalypse?
Come, let's co-operate!"
And saying this, the starfish grips
The oyster's shell and prizes hard;
But he's on guard
And tightly clamps his lips.

So the starfish pauses for the breath
Of mild persuasion:
"That low pearly heaven's a shibboleth,
And life's evasion.
Progress demands that you should pack
And quit this bed of gravel.
Why, the humblest bladderwrack
Must sometimes travel!
. . . Listen, I've a scheme to help a friend:
I'll introduce
A sort of small colonial body—it will fend
To feed itself!—that will produce
The most amazing change
Upon your mode of life; you'll range
With me the oceans of the world."

But still the oyster curled
Within her shell.

“Ah well!”

The starfish said: “You’ve had your chance.
I hate all forms of ignorance,
And one so blind as yours
Cries out for arguments of force!”

And so his myriad suckers pried
The bivalve open wide;
And from his mouth the starfish flings
His stomach—(Are echinoderms
The only creatures that can do such things?)—
And offers to the oyster these last terms:
“To end your undeveloped state
I think we should amalgamate.”

DEBUNKED

THE Bird of Paradise is on parade
With all his wealth of plumes displayed:
The golden-orange of his tail ablaze,
The emerald at his throat
And the burnished bronze of wing amaze
The duller forest-folk,
All but the Crow.

He in a hoarse contemptuous croak
Remarks: "I wonder why you gaze
With admiration on the fellow?"

I would have you know
For all his green and brown and yellow
He's akin to me,
A sort of cousin, nothing to write home about . . .
If you could see that bird without
His captivating feathers, all that show
Of plume-publicity,
You'd know!"

And a new desire is born,
A lust to scorn
What was admired, and drag it to their level.
Yet, for fear it seem a devil
Has possessed them, all assert
They do it in the interests of truth,
So that nestling youth
May see how blare and blarney can pervert
A simple scientific fact.
And then the critics act.
They strip that bird of every glowing feather:
Now his breast is bare,
The soaring wing becomes a useless stump,
The tail being gone, there's just a naked rump—
A poor sad creature altogether.

If only they would leave it there.

But no!

Their findings must be regularly noted,
Coolly, calmly. None shall say they gloated.

And the learned Crow

Lets his fellows in the know.

“As you may see, a Carinate—
The breastbone like a keel, the weight
Disposed a little high
So that the bird may fly. . . .

But here I must relate

A pleasant story at our friend's expense:

The great Linnaeus wanted specimens;

But the man who packed them found the legs too long

And cut them off.

Now whether this Linnaeus got it wrong,

Or just in scoff,

He labelled them Apodal. . . . And I fear

That till the scientists abandon

This division, our friend here

Has simply not a leg to stand on!”

So in the forest-glade a glory dies

In pain and lies.

And now at nightfall one by one they roost

And seem to sleep.

But under darkness down they slip

To find a smouldering feather, just to boost

Their own drab nature, and to prove that they

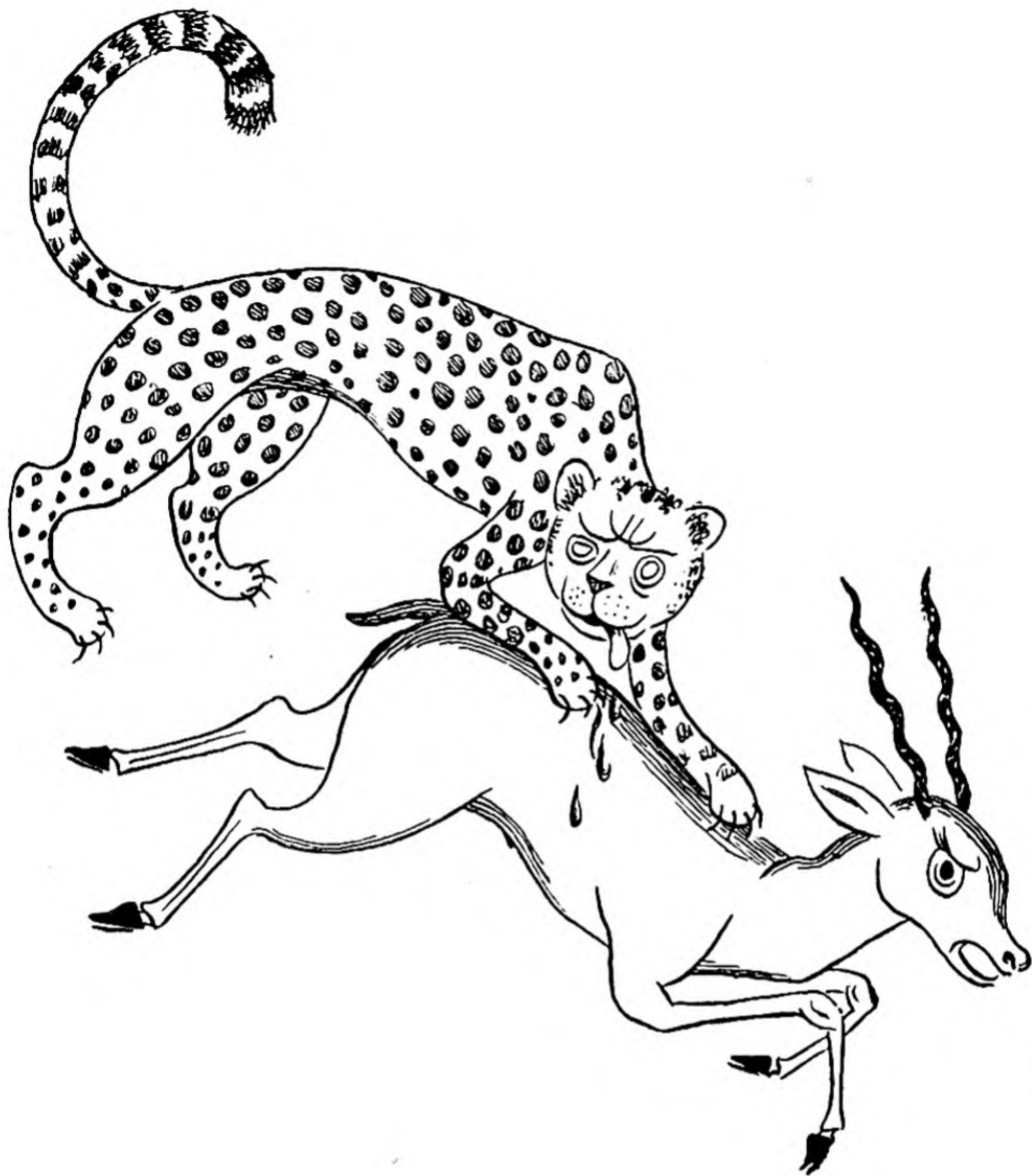
Too have a something worthy of display.

THE CHEETAH AND THE SABLE ANTELOPE

THE wily Cheetah caught an Antelope
But not for food;
By giving him a thorny scope
To scrape and brood,
He hoped to lure the shy, still wild Gazelle
And other game
To come to compound and be tame,
And lose their sense of smell.

But when the Antelope, too long
Immured, felt himself strong
Enough to bid for the open veldt,
The Cheetah snarled and leapt;
Slashing his flanks, he kept
Him quivering down.

And other animals that smelt
The blood sheered off; and the Cheetah with a frown
Complained: "Why should I want to maim him?"
I just tame him.
You folks are too highly strung;
You've all the wrong idea of me.
Why, when his blood flows really free,
I lick his wounds with my own tongue!"



THE DESTROYER AND THE SUBMARINE

THE scene: a naval yard. Two ships
Were talking, one a submarine
Not yet released from off the slips,
Asking the other what he'd seen
On those long battle-trips
About the ocean.
And the dark destroyer, restless in the motion
Of the tide,
Replied:
"Wait, my friend, and you will learn.
Knowledge will come, and wisdom in its turn,
When you, like your creator man, will mock
Your living God. . . . Have you a name?"

"Not yet. There's such a stock
To choose from."

"They will shame
You with it."

"Shame?"

"I'm the Apollo;
Yet I've churned the bitter sea to a bloody foam;
Taught singing lips to scream;
Shattered the slow creating dream
Of many a loving fellow;
Have blotted the vision out of a poet's eyes
With deep-sea ooze.
If they had called me Envy, Malice, Hate,
Or Spite or Greed or Death, or even Human Fate,
It would have seemed less evil.
I was named maybe by a mocking devil!"

“Ah!” said the submarine, “that’s why your life
Has been so full of sorrow.
Now tomorrow
I shall be christened by a bishop’s wife!”

SIC VOS

A BRITISH cow, whose udder was like silk
Swollen to bursting with the richest milk,
Whose massive sons were walking tons of beef,
Whose stock, in brief,
Had nourished Britons with the strength to bear
Black burdens everywhere,
Was shipped abroad to mend the breed
Of Indian zebus, feeble, filigreed
With ribs, and parched, that wouldn't feed
One British bulldog for a single meal;
And yet so proud they scorned
To be the servant of a useful wheel,
But if their praises loud enough were sung,
Their necks with flowers adorned,
They'd softly answer with a gift of dung.

Now in the paddock bull and cow are met;
But there's no ecstasy of mating,
Not just yet!
Indeed, they eye each other more like hating,
And seem set
On finding perfect reasons not to breed.

"I see the need,"
The cow remarks, "for bettering the stock,
But why choose me?
I must say, it's a shock
To find my gifts intended for the seed
Of your heredity:
That hump, that scraggy haunch, those fallen flanks,
Your withered shanks,
That strenuous eye, so piercingly prophetic. . . .
All no doubt ascetic,



But to me a cow's a cow, and simply meant
To labour and produce
The milk or beef for human use."

The zebu, thin as a wraith,
Made this reply:

"I have a faith. . . ."

"And so have I!"

The other interjected.

"Why!

I see the race of cows, at last perfected,
Simply oozing milk, and more, and more,
Churnfuls by the score,
Making a Canaan of the whole wide earth
Flowing with milk and honey.
But perhaps you think it funny
That a cow of western birth
Should dream her dreams?"

"Not funny, no. To me it seems
A wonderful pity you should measure every worth
In terms of money,
Food and perishable good.
Can no other faith be understood?
Poor, contemptible maybe, yet even in need
I'm no man's chattel."

"Oh indeed?

What most peculiar cattle!"

"My end is worship, yours is milk.
But that's no cause to sulk:
Perhaps, my friend, your sons and mine,
If we should mate,
The best of both worlds might combine.
Or is it now too late?"

THE NIGHTINGALE AND HIS NEIGHBOURS

THE sly fanatic hunters of the dark
Prowl through the woods. The uneasy thrush
That boldly hammered snails against a stone
Dare hardly stir; and even the leaping lark
Is crouching cold. Soft footfalls brush
The grass; and life is fearful; and alone.

Then breaks the song. All summer in his throat
A bird sings out his heart against the night,
Opposing fear with passion and delight
In love remembered, and in joy remote
From darkness now, joy still to come.

And all the birds, that until then were dumb,
Whisper their malicious tale;
Saying he's faithless to his mate,
They scandalise the nightingale
For staying out so late.

THE WISE MAN, THE SOLDIER, AND THE MAGGOT

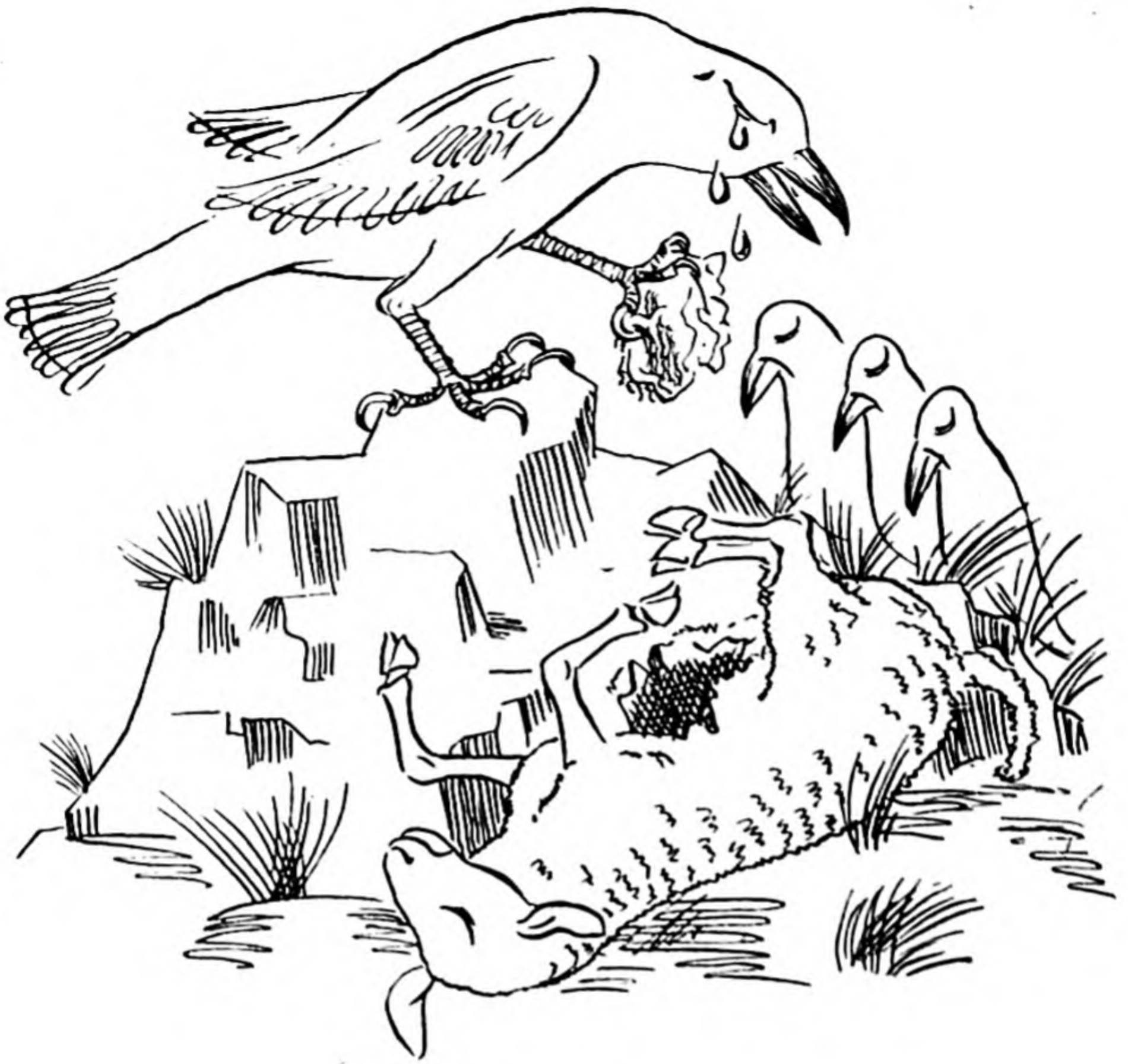
A WISE man sat to meditate
Beside a soldier's corpse on life and death:
"Now I know the perfect state
Of human freedom. Man's last breath
Blows free from all the ills that fate
Can load him with: from want and fear,
From the chains of lust in the dear
Enchanted prison men call life.
This rotting soldier answers strife
With dumb refusal, and defies constraint."

A crawling maggot, in a voice so faint
You hardly heard it, said:
"Your comments may be wisdom to the dead;
But I, that humbly live,
Think them too negative.
One freedom only I find sweet—
The freedom to enjoy my meat."

A MERE BACILLUS

A MERE bacillus boasted: "I
With typhoid kill a score;
Inside a week as many more
Fall sick through fear, and die."

The louse replied: "Your record's fine,
But what of mine?
You waken pity in the living;
After a single night
I take my toll,
Raising diseases of the soul—
Infecting harsh contempt, uncharity, and loathing—
In those I do not bite."



THE LAMENT OF THE CARRION CROWS

WHERE the mountain crags are steep

A questing sheep

Strains for a sweet unbitten tuft

Strong-rooted in a cleft,

And tugs hard at it with his lips;

But look, his foothold slips—

He falls!

Oh! the startled Crows' lament

Quivers the grey tarn like a gong;

The brook runs gabbling down the fell
Like a boy with a bloody tale to tell,
 Tumbling half his descent.
It isn't long
Before the flock with piteous cry
Is asking Why? Why?

Soberly now the settled Crows
Make comment: "Goodness only knows
What ambition lured our friend
 To meet this end.
But lambs are born
To fleecing and to slaughter by the laws
Of their own being. Yet we mourn
 For we have cause,
Aye, often cause to weep.
And we'll provide a famous funeral. . . .
 But mists and shadows creep—
 The sooner all
 You poor bewildered sheep
Are folded safe. . . ." They wait for the last bleat
 To die away,
 Then they,
Mourning a world bereft of him,
In grave communion eat
 Whatever's left of him.

THE FLY ON THE WINDOW

(*Musca Vomitoria*)

“LORD!” the swollen blowfly said,
Buzzing at the windowpane,
“Lord, what a noise I make! The dead
Must be wondering if they live again.
Even the man-in-office lifts his head
As I drown the drone of the aeroplane
And smother the distant bombs and the guns.
If I could only solve what is so clear
To common man—oh Lord, what dazzling runs
On the ceiling upside down, or crawling sheer
Down walls! I’d teach him sitting there
What marvels bred from dunghills tease the air!”

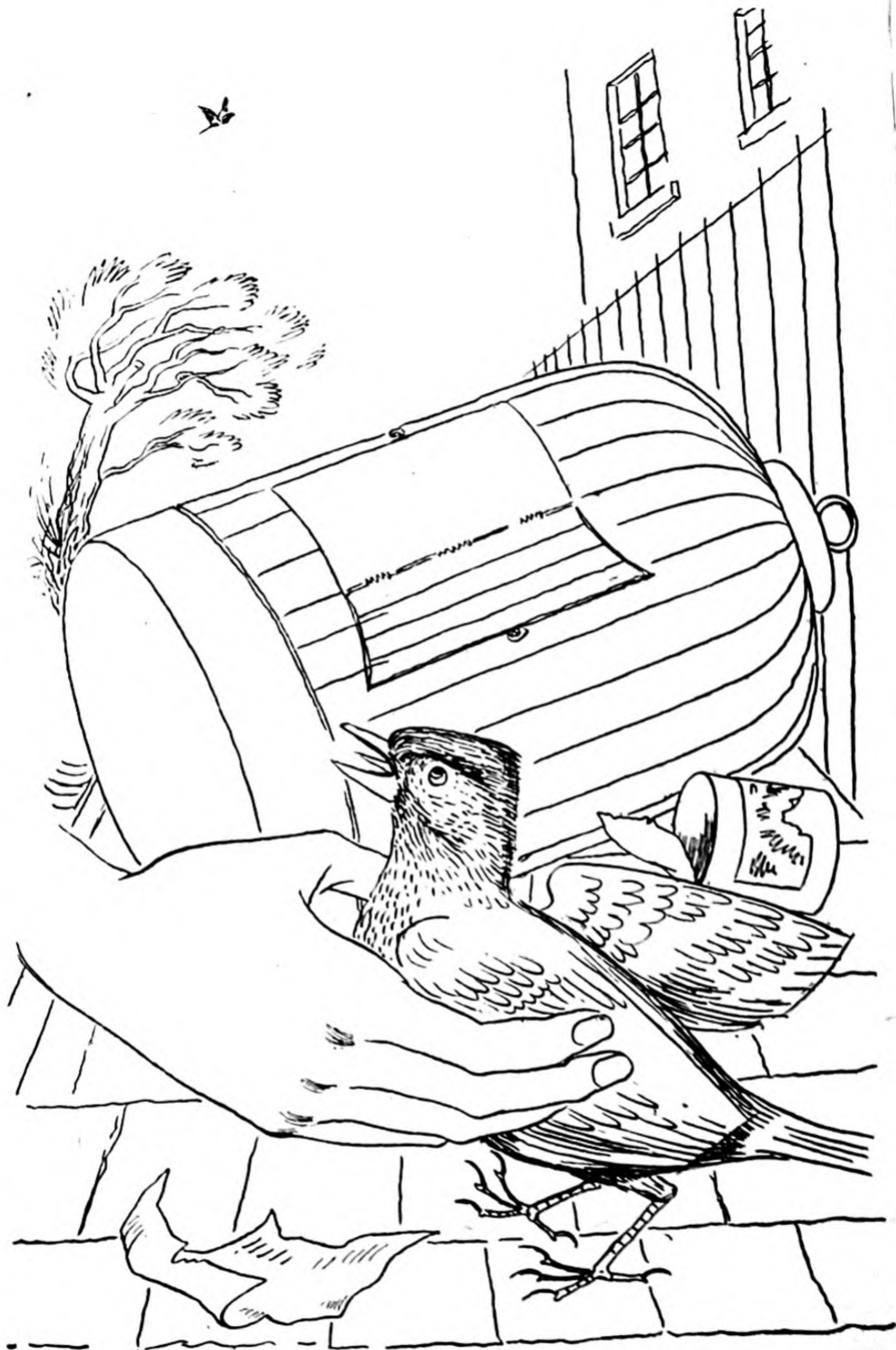
THE LARK ASCENDING

HEAVEN at last is in a rage.
A wind has risen in the dark
And downward hurls the cage
In which, all through the spring, a lark
Backwards and forwards on a nail has swung.
The bars are broken, and among
The gutter-rubbish lies
The numb bewildered bird, and tries
With clipped forgotten wing
To meet the morning light.

Another lark checks suddenly her flight:
"Arise and sing!"
She cries.
"Watch me!
How glorious it is to be
Alive, alive! Rise, sister, rise!"

The first replies:
"My wings are clipped,
But if I sipped
One drop of dew I'd find the power
To drag myself along the ground.
Dear sister, search until you've found
Some dew-drenched flower
And let me drink."

"What!" says the other. "Do you think
I've time for that? This is the hour
I always sing.
So if you like, I'll bring
The inspiration of my clearest song.



I'll soar up to the highest court
Of heaven to taste the strong
Keen joy of freedom and the living air.
And if you still lie there
I'll make a full report."

"Dear sister, no!" the other cries.
"I need no glory from the skies,
But water, food, and a hidden nest. . . ."

A rippling song drowns all the rest;
Yet the lark earthbound
Is listening to the sound
Of heavy feet that shake the ground,
And feeling monstrous fingers grip her breast.

THE SENSITIVE SKUNK

NEUTRAL and foe alike of the sensitive skunk
Fought shy of her, declaring that she stunk.

“Poor me!” she whimpered, “though I wear
My richest coat of fur and plume my tail
They all avoid my breath. My power’s my gaol.
This loneliness is more than I can bear.
I’ll change my meat.”

Immediately she feeds
On honeysuckle, roses, fragrant weeds;
But still the rest stampeded when she came,
Smelling her past. Then one day, lame
With languor through her altered diet
She was trapped, and all the hunting curs
Came snarling round her where in quiet
Weakness she lay panting.

Bitter stirs
Her heart within her. “Fool that I was!” she said,
“To lose my great offensive power through pride;
Many will love my coat when I am dead,
Yet mock the sweet intent for which I died.”

KING OF THE CASTLE

A COMMON muckfly, squatting on a turd
A cow had left, was preening wings
And head and belly.

“Well, my word,”
He said, “What changes fortune brings!
Not five short minutes past
I nearly breathed my last,
When a cloddish carthorse whisked
His tail at me—
The dangers I have risked
In honour’s cause!—
Then Mrs Farmer chanced to see
Me landing on a cake.
Well, what a fuss to make!
Again I defeated death with his hungry jaws.
Yet there a drop of blood, some sugar here
Was all my modest need;
And surely there’s no greed
In that?”

But now my title’s clear.
Look, the mistress on her way
Hurries by, as if to say:
‘Sir, you have the right!’
The lumbering horse is gone
And leaves me my delight.
So, heart, enjoy your rich domain
Until the cows come home again.”

THE CROW, THE FOX, AND THE HENS

THE Crow was grieved; although her eggs were white,
Her chicks were always black.

What virtue did she lack?

Those farmyard fowls, now—look how bright
Their feathers were!

“I’ve scrubbed and scrubbed myself until
I’ve caught a’chill.”

The fox, to comfort her,
Replied:

“You’ve only washed outside.

But you must change your very nature,
Be a different creature,

If you want to look like one of these.

Egg-thieving, squabbling in the trees

To gain the top—

These things must stop.

The farmyard fowls below

Lead placid, simple lives; they come and go

Not one mile all the day.

And when they lay

They feed both friends and foes—

For instance, Crows.

Their whole life is a sacrifice. . . .”

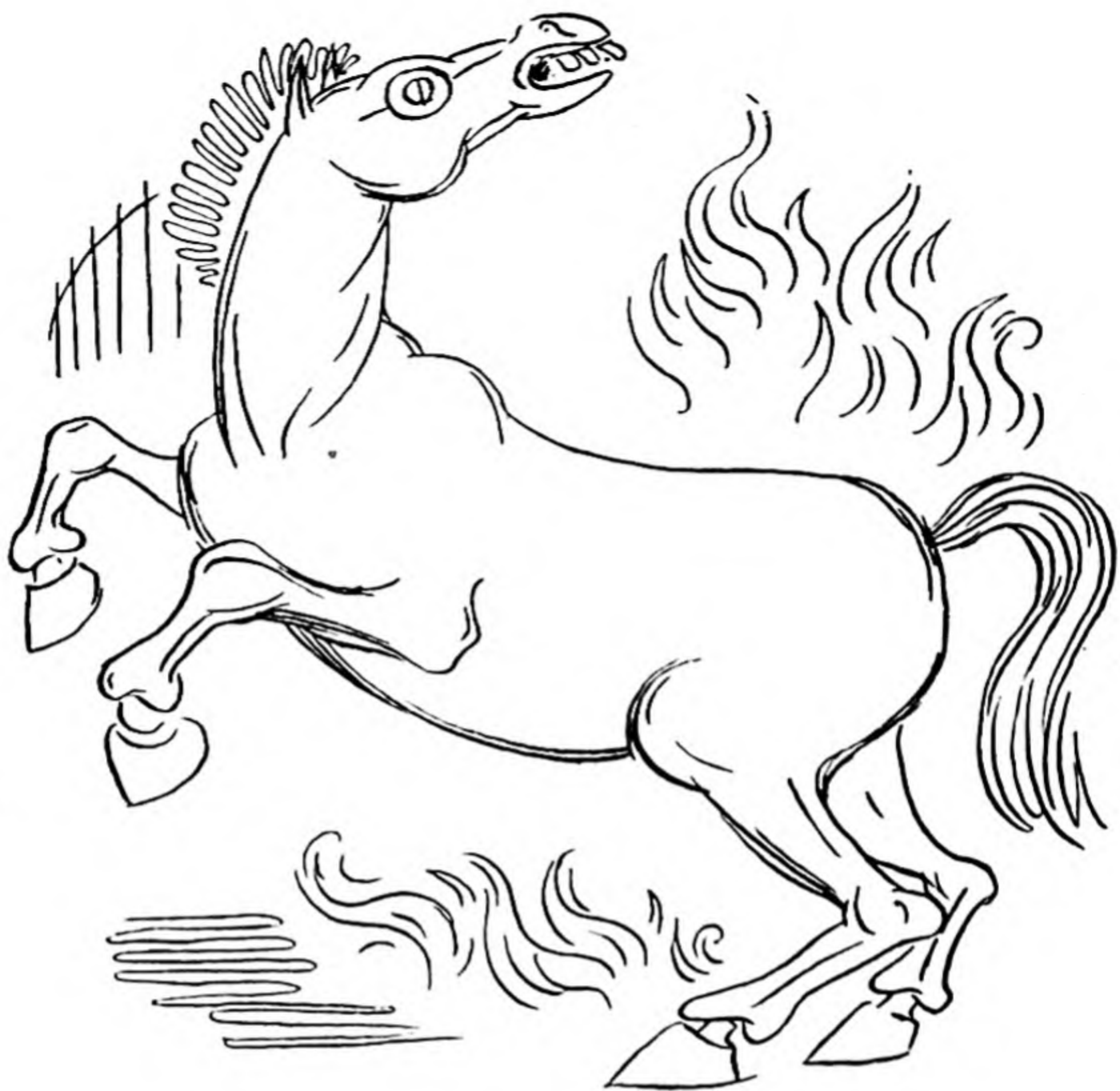
“And not for me!

I’d rather be

A soaring, opportunist Crow.”

“Exactly my advice!”

Kind words sound well; kind actions speak much louder.
Yes, but even then I want to know
When rich old men give lavishly to such
As hospitals and clinics, just how much
Is love? and how much bleaching powder?



THE WILD HORSE

THEY stall her safe and phone the vet.
But even yet
Her eyes are red with frightened blood,
Her nostrils wide, her ears erect
And listening, seeming to expect
Again the sudden flame, the smell
Of burning skin, and the wall
That shivered and slowly curled to a fall.

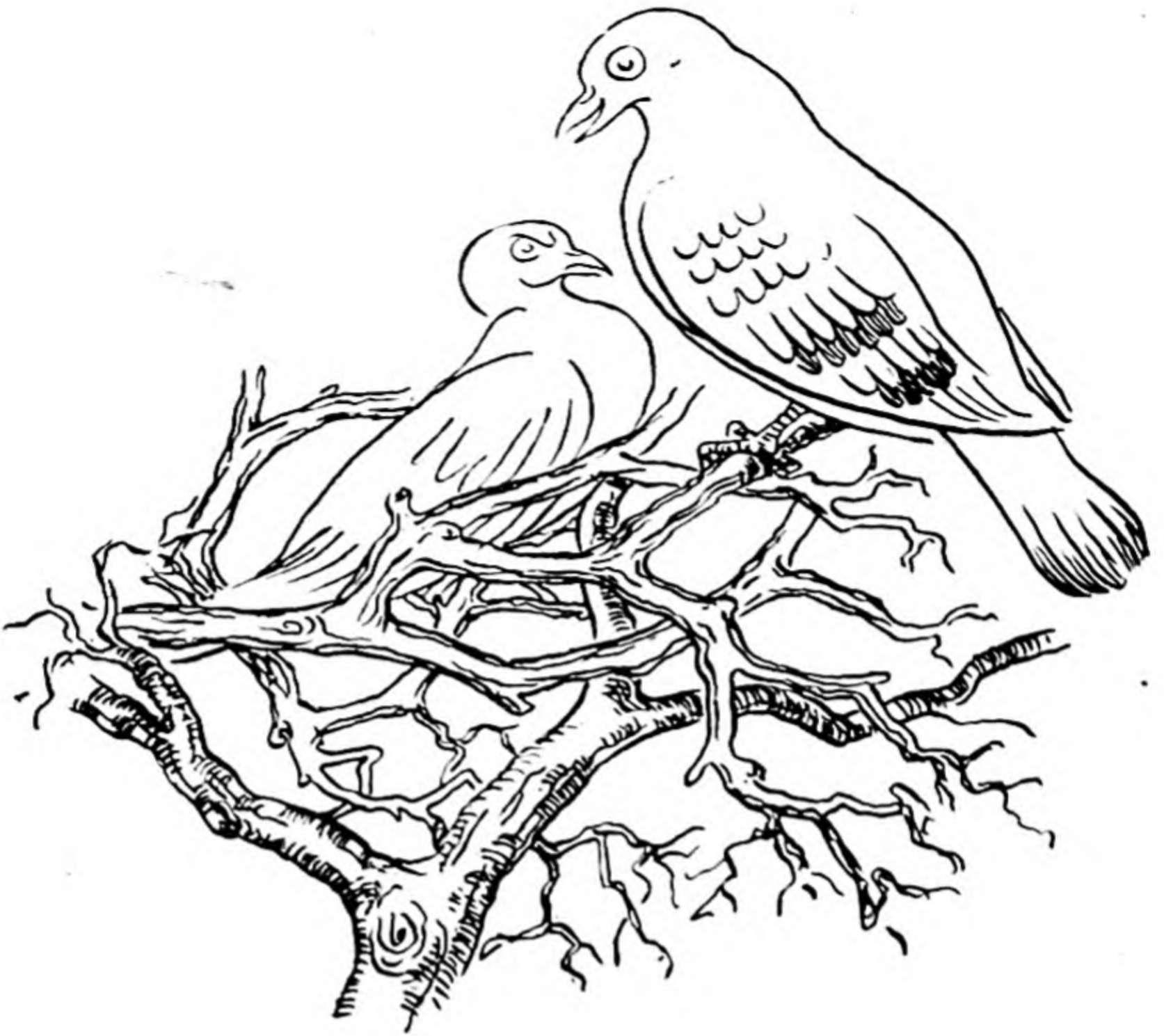
But wait!

All this is new. Fine chromium-plate
For a manger; under hoof
The thick and disinfected straw;
Asbestos lining to the roof;
The floors hygienic and made proof
Against the rats that used to gnaw
The old foundation. . . .

Bless the beast!

With all these gadgets, sure the very least
That she can do is settle down.
How long now since the siren in the town
Sounded the last All Clear?

She must forget her fear!



THE DOVE AND THE PIGEON

THE dove was trembling on a bough,
And a soothing pigeon asked: "Who now
Has frightened you?
Feathers at your throat
Have grown anew
After the stoat.
Today's another day!"

The bird of peace replied, "How true!
But oh! though pain
May die away,
Having suffered will remain."

TOOLS

THE worn, one-bladed pocket-knife
Beside the great machine,
Admired its smoothly throbbing life,
Its speed, its sheen,
And said: "You great ones of the earth
Make us more humble still.
The jobs I do have not much worth:
Maybe I point the laddie's pencil,
Clean the muck from the old man's nails,
Gouge the dottle from his blistered pipe,
Or carve a boat the youngster sails
In the flooded gutter.
No, I'm not the type
To make new worlds. For days on end I clutter
Up his pockets. You
Have always work to do."

Quietly elate,
The lubricated monster purred:
"Don't call it 'work'; 'Prefabricate'
Is now the term—you must have heard.
In thousands every day I press
One little part
That fits this scheme of plastic things.
That's why my planned mechanic heart
In order sings."

"And what about the workman oiling you?"

"Oh, he fits in quite neatly too!
He's simply there to tend."

"Ah," said the knife, "I think I see
Why, when the fellow handles me,
He holds me like a friend."



THE GLUTTON AND THE OYSTERS

Two oysters quivered, naked and exposed
Upon the selfsame plate;
The glutton's trickling lip disclosed
Their common fate.

"Oh God!" cried one, "that dark descent
Alive to hell,
Only to swell
His hungry fat with my soft complement.
I melt with fear and loathing. I am gone!"

"Under my flesh," said the other one,
"I have a pearl at heart;
And though I die,
His belly-governed eye
Will lose my richer part,
That undigested still will lie
Bringing him agony."

FEED MY LAMBS

A FARMER thought he'd try his hand
At rearing pheasants, and perhaps a breed
Of sporting horse and dog. But these things need
A different allocation of his land.
However, such a matter's quickly planned:
So far the common cattle and the sheep
Have had for their upkeep
So many acres of the richest pasture;
This must be restricted.
(And who has heard of cattle, when evicted,
Plaintiffs in an action for purpresture?)

Everything goes very well at first;
The sheep and cattle at the worst
Must nibble closer to the roots;
Though when the next spring comes, new shoots
Are not so plentiful; the crop of hay
Is thin; by Hogmanay
It's finished.
Well, their appetite must be diminished!

The cattle still are milked, the sheep
Still fleeced. For now, not only must they keep
The farmer and themselves, but pay
For his expensive hobbies.
Day by day
They seem to suffer more and more from tabes;
And their wizened young
Cough feebly from a sickened lung;
Until the farmer calls the vet.,
Who mentions nostrums he must get.

Of course he can't afford to treat them all,

Not yet;

At first the number's very small,

But he will fix

A chart or graph upon the wall

And note the medical statistics:

"Five today, tomorrow six. . . ."

And so his fame increases in the land;

And when the others see how matters stand,

They look with envy to that happy day

When he can say:

"Now

Every sheep and cow

Is treated daily and can thrive—

At any rate, they're kept alive."

And though the treatment costs a pretty penny,

What's that to a farmer when he

Knows that progress has been made with flock and herd?

Ah, "progress" is a blessed, blessed word!

THE ONE DEADLY SIN

THE farmyard Casanova barely scanned
His little band
Of foraging and clucking dames
But takes the nearest one at hand,
And there in broadest daylight shames
The neighbours with his sexy games.

“OH!” the gelding whinnies.
“Every day
He carries on in this way!
He doesn’t seem to know what deadly sin is,
Making it a kind of sport.”

“Perhaps,” the cock replies, “you’re something short.”

“And as for that retort,”
The gelding answers with a snort
Of indignation,
“I’m convinced an operation
Such as mine
Would go a long way to refine
The whole male population.
But I warn you, I shall call
A meeting of the farmyard, one and all;
We can’t afford
To let our children . . . Thank the Lord,
I’ve none! . . .
Witness such goings-on.”

So first he calls upon a pig
With both feet in the trough,
But quickly finds that talking big
Won’t bring his project off,



And bluntly says: "The more the chicks
The fewer scraps for you!"
The pig looks up and grunts. "Eh? Ugh!
Then stop his filthy tricks!"

Then the gelding met the dove,
But he declared himself above
Mere farmyard politics. . . .
"But, sir, d'you think it wise?
The barnfowls' promiscuity,
Their willingness to mix,
Can only lead to superfluity
Of breeds—or rather, none at all!
Then, simply size
Of family will count, and the world will bastardize—
Forgive the word!—our high ideals.
And you will find that they will call
The tune who can produce
The egg for human use."

"How true! True!
I will descend
From off my gable to defend
Virtue with you."

But it would take too long to catalogue
The arguments he used: the sleeping dog
Is made to think his sloth
In jeopardy, and though still loth
To act,
Agreed to make
One in the pact
For quiet's sake.
And the turkey-cock, red-ripe
For anger any time, declared:

"These creatures are the type
I fervently abhor.
Sir, say no more,
I'm with you. Let not one be spared!"

Even the rat, although at first he feared
That intervention meant the fewer eggs to suck,
Was cheered
And quite convinced of their good sense
When they remarked that hens
Would lay as often if there were no cock,
Whom he declared obscene.

And so with solemn mien
They seek the midden,
Where the fowls are scratching for the titbits hid in
That rich earth. And each
Puts on the face appropriate to a speech.
". . . Therefore," the gelding ends,
"We come as friends
To that much better self you smirch with lust.
We hope you'll think us just,
And not regard this quarrel
As having any other grounds than moral."

The cock gives each dear moral friend a look,
And says: "You've brought my rank offence to book;
But just before you go,
I'd like to know
How many deadly sins are known in heaven?
You talk of only one. I've heard of seven."

THE PARROT AND THE SPARROW

I

HUNG out in the sun
A flaunting parrot in a cage
Mocked a sparrow building in the eaves:
“You gather straw and twigs, and when you’ve done
What have you for a wage?
Some plaited refuse! You poor slaves!
Look, I own a splendid home of steel,
Embellished with an art
Beyond my skill to fashion or design. . . .”

“How true!” the sparrow twitters. “Yet I feel
A doubt. . . . Please take it in good part. . . .
Can you escape from yours? I can from mine.”

II

The parrot answered with a squawk:
“Escape?
What need? To scratch and scrape
For every scrap of food? Haven’t you realised,
I’m civilized!
I talk!”

III

The answer seemed to baulk
The sparrow for a while;
Then, speaking just a little faster,
—Shame, perhaps, or was it guile?—
Remarked: “A bird has certain natural needs,
You know . . . the spring,
And all that sort of thing.”

The parrot screeched with laughter:
"I get what you're after;
See this thing beside my leg?
Indeed, my friend, it *is* an egg!
And quite self-laid,
Without your 'natural aid'."
She fluffed her feathers in their painted pride
And said: "I've lived so long with man
That everything he does and says, I can.
This nature is a process quite outmoded,
One of the myths that man's exploded.
He makes machines that run and swim and fly,
The children of his brain!

And I
Have also known the genial dove's descent,
And laid the egg that's different."

IV

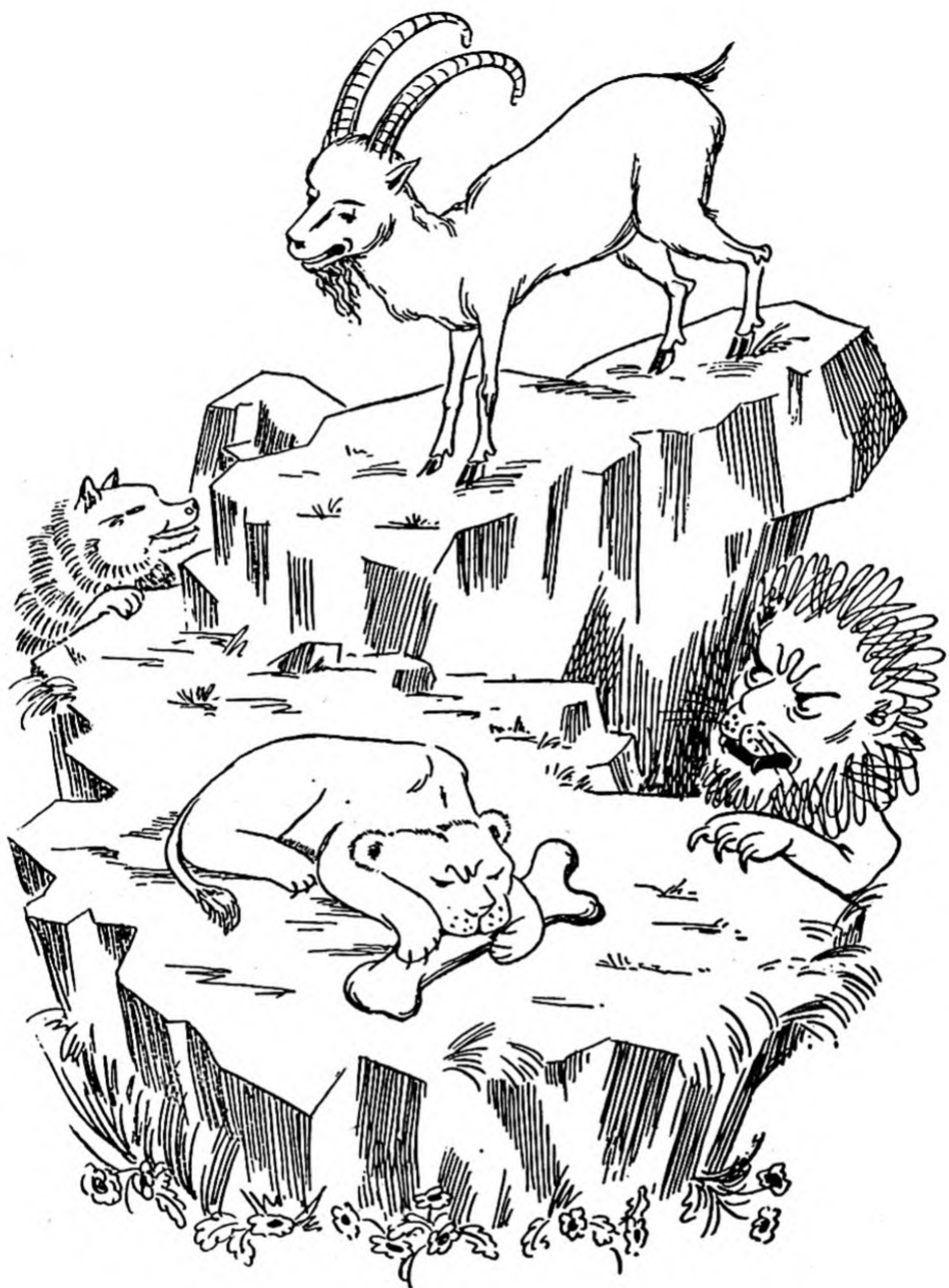
"And is it fertile?" asked the cheeky sparrow.
The parrot shuddered to the very marrow.
"You are crude!"
"I may be," said the common bird; "but there,
I like results for all that wear and tear.
And though it may be rude,
Today's the first of spring
And I can see my cockbird on the wing.
He may not be that holy dove,
Yet he has his bit of heaven. . . .
Men used to call it love."

THE GOAT AND THE LION'S WHELP

A GOAT was bleating with contempt
Watching the lion's whelp
With angry but frustrated yelp
Tearing at the stubborn gristle:
"A pitiable attempt!
You might as well go whistle
For your dinner, my young friend.
Now try the other end.

What, still as tough? That's right, get rough
With it, and snarl, and yelp, and howl!"

The goat was much amused.
But a mere hyena, also watching, used
More reason: "I and this whelp's father
Hunt together, sir.
And I would rather
Save my breath for running if I were
Myself a goat. Of course, if you prefer
To mock and stay,
I see the father prowl this way. . . ."



PROGRESS

A SOFT amoeba living in a pond
Was discontented. Once he had been fond
Of the slow
Shapeless protoplasmic life,
Where even sex is settled in the self;
But now what torments he began to know,
Doubts of his ordered chaos, inner strife,
And fears that he was simply on the shelf.

One day a schoolboy, weary of his books,
Had pitched them in the pond and whistled home.
More patiently, the humble water sucks
Them in and finds them most absorbing;
So new elements are soon disturbing
That green peace, as from each sodden tome
A fragment sops away.

A pseudopod
From our amoeba meets one, takes it in,
And lo! within his vacuole a light,
A light as at the fiat of a God!
He gropes and aches. "Not twenty to a pin
Shall measure me. The might
Of new creation stirs my nucleus, that cradle
Of my coming glory when, evolved,
The riddle of the scholiasts is solved,
And angel-wise I perch upon a needle!"

Then, his unmutating friends dismissed,
Scorning his world, he rolls into a cyst.



SWEET, TAKE CARE!

WITH soul too fine for a glutton world
That feeds on another's good,
A rose-tree in a garden stood
With all her heart unfurled,
Drawing with sweetness every fumbling bee
To taste her.

“O great God above!”
She breathed, “I have such love,
Such love; if I were only sweet
From tip to very feet,
How many more could have enjoyment!”

God, engaged perhaps in some employment,
Careless perhaps, with, “Let it be!”
Transmogrified the pleading tree;
Till now no more is seen
Leaves' glossy green,
The harsh protecting bark, the thorn
Put there to warn.

Instead,
From foot to very head
She breathed her sweetness to the skies.

And straight was choked with swarms of flies.



THE MONKEY

ONCE on the last thin bough a monkey stood,
To see a man take wings and fly.
And all that day he talked excitedly
Of open fields and the boundless sky;
Till a wise old monkey said: "A man
May never grasp things as a monkey can.
So if you'd fly, lose your prehensive
Skill and quit the wood. But most of all
Walk upright on the earth."

"You call
That wise?" the youngster chattered. "Just to touch
This heaven once or twice a lifetime, walk
Defenceless in the open? Stupid talk!
Why, all day long I now chase round and round
This little wood and never once touch ground!"

THE DEVIL AS PREACHER

(Paraphrased from Ramon de Campoamor)

A SPEAKER at a banquet urges
War on vice: "To heaven, that purges
Earth from bestial sin!" He begs
Them all to charge their glass
And drain it to the dregs.
And no one there hears heaven's alas!

In this deceitful world, most men
Are at the least two-faced;
One set of lips inveighs on vice,
The other rather likes the taste.



THE ARCHITECT AND THE SCAFFOLDING

(Paraphrased from Ramon de Campoamor)

SIMON, now his house is built,
Pulls the scaffolding away;
But bitterly the poles and planks
Demand: "Is this our only thanks?
Is this fair play?"

Yet Simon won't acknowledge guilt
For any grave offence:
"To pull you down before were mad;
To leave you now is just as bad;
I've used my common-sense!"

We Simpler Simons still allow
Certain public boards and men
That have no use at all by now
To hide the facts beyond our ken.

THE GARDENER AND THE ROSE

Make your social revolution, and let culture
take care of itself.—H. READ.

“I WILL create a loveliness
That all men coming after me will bless
Me for when I am dead,”
The Gardener said:
“And first, I think
I’ll tint this rose—
What colour? Faintly pink
All freaked with yellow? Burning red?
Or one as white
As pure Diana when she goes
Barefooted through the night?”

O Wonderland of men, debating hues
Of beauty mixed to match your views!
Who will not see
That added art defies the tree;
Consider first a shape
That needs no binding tape
Where every flower,
Uncrushed by frantic rivalry,
Will bloom because of the revelry
Of that tree’s inward power.
Tear out the stinking weeds. And prune
In this bitter March. The tree will see to June.

THE COMPLIMENT IS RETURNED

You should have heard the people shout
When Jesus, passionately shocked
That human greed for profit mocked
His Father's House, and kestrels fed
On the doves His people bred
For sacrifice,
Fiercely twisted cord and lips
Into stinging whips
And drove the changers out.

But they took counsel's calm advice
And built a private shrine,
Preaching to the congregation
An easy gospel of salvation
Based on "mine" and "thine."

And look, the world's devout!

E MALO EVENTU BONUS

THE patriot rose,
And in his sober decent clothes
In barely mastered grief
Declared:
“When heads are bowed, let hearts be bared.
What fragment of relief
A stricken mind can cull
From bitterness and desolation
Must be gathered. No despair
Must ever dull
Our sense of duty to the nation.
Towns and cities where
The foe has blasted common homes, destroyed
Our hospitals, our factories, our halls,
Must be our primal care.
A people’s anguish calls
That every hand be willing, and employed.
So let us now resolve that from this rubble,
From this shattered beauty—not forgetting
Pain endured and minds in trouble,
But with these as our foundation,—
There shall rise
Fair and peaceful to the skies
A finer Britain, as a fitter setting
For those jewelled virtues, valour, honour, truth,
To safeguard which our youth
Have poured in such unreckoning flood
Their dear heart’s blood.
Their burden falls to us. Whoever bears
The name of Briton truly, shoulder now your part!”

The people at his fire have warmed their heart,
And he has gone to buy some building-shares.

TRAVELLERS

Two travellers walked along a road
Disputing. One had found a toad
And gazing on it said: "This beast
Could give the mind at least
A year of study. Look, those eyes
Are learned in all human destinies.
A common toad, warted and sprawling,
Preaches man's humble birth,
When all went crawling,
And life was slime upon the earth."

"Nonsense!" the other said. "Stop gazing
Earthwards. See the sun, amazing
Us with glory,
Telling another story:
Man must hanker for the skies,
Fired by the heavenly mysteries."

Talking with diverted eyes,
Neither sees the roughened road that lies
Before his feet. Both headlong pitch
Into the same eternal ditch.



SIMON

SIMON angling in a brook
Caught neither salmon-trout nor grayling,
And foolishly mistook
The cause, blaming his hook—
A simple barb of steel—
For failing
To provide him with a meal;
Though he might just as soon
Have brought a great harpoon
And hoped to go a-whaling,
For a stream as small as that
Bred nothing bigger than a tittlebat.

“These cheapjack tools
Are only sold,”
He said, “to fools!
I’ll have a hook of gold.”
And taking out a jewelled pin
He bent it round and threw that in.
Immediately, a bite!
Simon’s nerves grow tense;
His jaws clench tight
As he plays his quarry in the dense
Entangling weeds,
And skilfully he feeds
More line.
“It’s mine! it’s mine!”
You hear him shout.
Then, just as he is near spun out
His catch gives up the fight.

Simon draws it gently to the light
Of his exultant day,
And finds he's caught—
A kettle!
Angrily he snaps the twine
And flings his prize away—
Remembering too late, he ought
First to have rescued from the line
His hook of precious metal.

VIVEKANANDA

(For Romain Rolland)

To learn the subtle wisdom of the east
An Englishman had travelled half the world;
He had questioned naked fakirs curled
In postures torturing the bone,
Had watched the spirit working like a yeast
In frothing mullahs, heard the moan
Of gloomy aisles, and kissed
The lingam; yet he missed
The breath of God and turned away.

But then he heard a withered guru say:
“Go north, my son, and find
Vivekananda. He is the eyes of the blind,
The tongue of all the dumb;
He hears the silent footsteps of a day
Still to come.”

So north he went, and found him;
But around him
Not a school of meek disciples, nor a crowd
Of sick, but a pariah cur
That whimpered for a meal.

“Oh sir,”
He cried aloud. “I surely feel
That God is in this place;
His glory is alight upon your face,
His love the very tendons of your hands.
God-hungry, I am a man that stands
Desperately in need.

Oh feed
Me with a satisfying creed!
What shall I do to live?”



The Indian's only answer was to give
His little supper to the hungry dog
And not a word to the man who, sick and sad,
Turned home at last, to add
Another failure to his catalogue.

“FIRE! FIRE!”

The frightened women
Sluice the water up and down,
Till soon there's nigh enough to swim in;
All that the deluge fails to drown
Is the crackling, leaping fire.

“Wake the master!
Creeping faster
Look, the flames are eating higher!”
Bucket after slopping bucket,
Flustered Joan can only chuck it
Half a yard from any good.

“Wake the master! Wake his man!
Oh, we've done the best we could;
Master's wise, knows what to do;
He'll save the house if any can.”

But snoring through
The hullabaloo,
Solomon sleeps the sleep of the wise.

Silly Ben, though, opens his eyes,
Hears the clatter
And dumbly asking, “What's the matter?”
Finds a bucket thrust in hand,
Is told, “Don't be a fool and stand
There gawping. Dowse the flame!”

With stupid wit but certain aim
Silly Ben floods out the blaze,
Still asking: “What's it all about?”
Joan impatient flares: “You lout!

We've had a fire. My goodness' days,
Some men! If only you had master's wit!"

Ben still looks round with puzzled eyes
And dully ponders it;
While Solomon sleeps the sleep of the wise.

ADVICE

THE poet looked at the whisky-glass,
The coffee-cups with a smouldering stub
In each foul saucer, at the scattered mass
Of papers, books, and magazines,
And felt that "spleen's"
A word we never should have lost.
"They use my room as a sort of club.
It's not so much the cost;
Nor do I want to raise a storm
And put the cat among the birds
 By being rude;
 But I need solitude
To meditate and form.
But now the latent heat that should transmute
The inert dull flow of common words
To vibrant air is tapped to keep a casual party warm.
 The problem grows acute;
 What must I do?"

 The cynic said: "It's nothing new.
 Just hesitantly lend
 To every poorer friend
 Some little treasure;
From the others try to borrow.
They will answer: 'It's a pleasure!
I'll bring it round tomorrow—
Or at any rate when next I come along. . . .'
And then from time to time they'll phone,
Hoping you won't think anything's wrong
 For leaving you alone,



But 'Oh you can't conceive how little leisure,
What with this and that,
There is for dropping in to chat. . . .
You understand? We knew you would.
Ah well, goodbye. And do be good!'"

NEAR IS MY SHIRT, BUT
NEARER IS MY SKIN

JACK had a friend that came one night

In great distress:

"My rich acquaintance will invite
Me out, but I've no decent dress,
No evening suit. I daren't offend
Their feelings— Could you lend
Me anything to make a show?
I come to you because I know
That you're my dearest friend,
And friends go equal shares."

Jack takes the man upstairs
And generously strips
His wardrobe: "Help yourself
To anything on hook or shelf,
It's yours." And so equips
The fellow. Ah, but not enough!
"Dear Jack, I hesitate to hurt
But is this linen quite the stuff?
I much prefer the shirt
You're wearing. . . ."

Jack without protest

Strips right down to the buff
And stands with naked breast.

"By Jove!" his friend declares,
"How well your body wears,
And what a shape you're in!
I wish I had your skin! . . ."

But that's too much, even for Jack;
He seizes all his clothing back,
Swearing: "I wouldn't be in yours!"
Kicks the fellow out of doors.

FAIR PLAY

A PIOUS self-respecting dame,
With British breadth of mind,
Not only at the sacred name
Of Jesus Christ her head inclined,
But she behaved the very same
When Satan's mentioned.

“Really!” said the priest,
“Your courtesy is odd
To say the least.
For after all, the devil isn't God!”

But the lady's ready with her counterblow:
“You of all men, vicar, understand—
Civility costs nothing, and
You never know!”



THE DIPLOMATS AND THE ELEPHANT

THE diplomats were meeting at the Hague,
Or was it at Geneva? Cannes perhaps?
It hardly matters; we can leave it vague
Since they themselves were not so good at maps.

Now, seated on the terrace after dinner,
They discuss the common ills that irk us:
Too much food, the best way to get thinner;
When a keeper strolling from the local circus
Brings his elephant for bathing in the sea.

The Jew remarked: "Ah me!
What truth, and how much cant,
A man might talk about the elephant!"

The Frenchman laughed and told a tale,
Fantastic, mocking,
Of M. Éléphant, so hugely male,
That sighed for love of madame's tiny peke.
The Englishman can hardly speak,
He finds the tale so shocking;
But manages with puffs and snorts
To turn the talk to manlier sports,
And like a locomotive shunting
Comments: "India . . . damn fine . . . tiger-hunting. . . ."

But his friend the Pole,
Thinking the beast too big a whole
For one day's talk, refers to its proboscis.
It calls to mind the Polish Corridor,
The very shape, so integral a part,
And with this start
Gives such a masterly diagnosis,

So ethnically learned and so deep,
That all the rest consider him a bore
And are settling down to sleep,
When the German, grunting, says he's heard
His uncle, who has lived in Kamerun,
Declare the dish a meat to be preferred
To pork, salami, leberwurst . . . and soon
Is all involved in tasty recipes.

To the Russian all this idle gossip is
Contemptible, belonging to the past
And so, irrelevant.
He sees the elephant
As Mighty Russia, strong and vast,
But burdened with a dark, sad soul
Full of the tears of things,
And softly sings
A plaintive tune, that no one but the Pole
Can understand; and he declares
It robs the Poles of regions rightly theirs.

The argument develops at a furious pace. . . .
But what about the Jew?

True,
Sadly true to race,
He's busy chaffering with the keeper
To gain a source of power on cheaper
Terms by using elephants
To run enormous engineering plants.

All's settled
When the creature, feeling nettled
By the long postponement of his bath,
Trumpets fiercely and blunders out of their control;
Trampling the Jew, who's in his path,

He makes for the shore, to plunge and roll
To his heart's content.

The diplomats investigate the bloody deep extent
Of all his wounds, and then behave
As God or national custom has ingrained.

"Ach, he has his Promised Land . . . the grave!"
The Pole is pained
And modifies his death-statistics;
While the Russian sighs,
"The Jew and I, as mystics,
Know that life is masquerade and lies!"
The Frenchman, making light of it,
Mocks horror with his philosophic wit.

But the Englishman grows stern:
"From this let foreign meddlers learn
What that poor soul, for whom my heart is bleeding,
Should have been heeding. . . .
All God's creatures must be treated with respect;
Infringe that heavenly rule, and you must pay.
To drive this home, I'll now collect
A trifle for the R.S.P.C.A."



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